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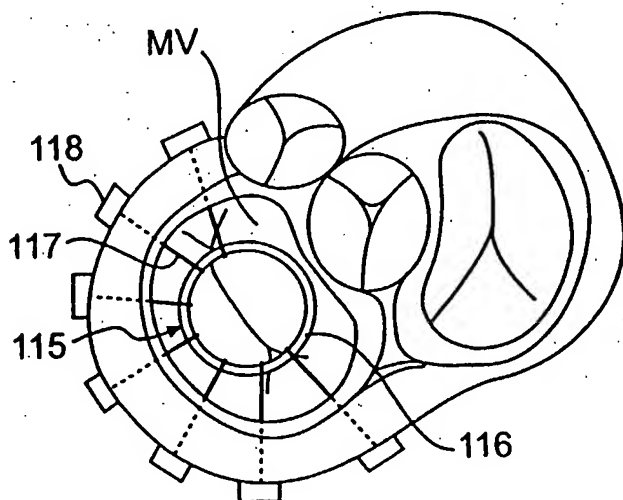
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(54) Title: **DEVICES AND METHODS FOR HEART VALVE TREATMENT**



(57) Abstract: Devices and methods for treating heart valves include members that assist the valve in closing during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle. Such devices include members configured to alter the shape of a valve annulus, reposition at least one papillary muscle, and/or plug an orifice of the valve so as to provide a coaptation surface for the valve leaflets.

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Devices and Methods for Heart Valve Treatment

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[001] The present invention relates to devices and related methods for treating and improving the function of dysfunctional heart valves. More particularly, the invention relates to devices and related methods that passively assist to close a heart valve to improve valve function of poorly functioning valves.

Description of the Related Art

[002] Various etiologies may result in heart valve insufficiency depending upon both the particular valve as well as the underlying disease state of the patient. For instance, a congenital defect may be present resulting in poor coaptation of the valve leaflets, such as in the case of a monocusp aortic valve, for example. Valve insufficiency also may result from an infection, such as rheumatic fever, for example, which may cause a degradation of the valve leaflets. Functional regurgitation also may be present. In such cases, the valve components may be normal pathologically, yet may be unable to function properly due to changes in the surrounding environment. Examples of such changes include geometric alterations of one or more heart chambers and/or decreases in myocardial contractility. In any case, the resultant volume overload that exists as a result of an insufficient valve may increase chamber wall stress. Such an increase in stress may eventually result in a dilatory process that further exacerbates valve dysfunction and degrades cardiac efficiency.

[003] Mitral valve regurgitation often may be driven by the functional changes described above. Alterations in the geometric relationship between valvular components may occur for numerous reasons, including events ranging from focal myocardial infarction to global ischemia of the myocardial tissue.

Idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy also may drive the evolution of functional mitral regurgitation. These disease states often lead to dilatation of the left ventricle. Such dilatation may cause papillary muscle displacement and/or dilatation of the valve annulus. As the papillary muscles move away from the valve annulus, the chordae connecting the muscles to the leaflets may become tethered. Such tethering may restrict the leaflets from closing together, either symmetrically or asymmetrically, depending on the relative degree of displacement between the papillary muscles. Moreover, as the annulus dilates in response to chamber enlargement and increased wall stress, increases in annular area and changes in annular shape may increase the degree of valve insufficiency. Annular dilatation is typically concentrated on the posterior aspect, since this aspect is directly associated with the expanding left ventricular free wall and not directly attached to the fibrous skeleton of the heart. Annular dilatation also may result in a flattening of the valve annulus from its normal saddle shape.

[004] Alterations in functional capacity also may cause valve insufficiency. In a normally functioning heart, the mitral valve annulus contracts during systole to assist in leaflet coaptation. Reductions in annular contractility commonly observed in ischemic or idiopathic cardiomyopathy patients therefore hamper the closure of the valve. Further, in a normal heart, the papillary muscles contract during the heart cycle to assist in maintaining proper valve function. Reductions in or failure of the papillary muscle function also may contribute to valve regurgitation. This may be caused by infarction at or near the papillary muscle, ischemia, or other causes, such as idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy, for example.

[005] The degree of valve regurgitation may vary, especially in the case of functional insufficiency. In earlier stages of the disease, the valve may be able to compensate for geometric and/or functional changes in a resting state.

However, under higher loading resulting from an increase in output requirement, the valve may become incompetent. Such incompetence may only appear during intense exercise, or alternatively may be induced by far less of an exertion, such as walking up a flight of stairs, for example.

[006] Conventional techniques for managing mitral valve dysfunction include either surgical repair or replacement of the valve or medical management of the patient. Medical management typically applies only to early stages of mitral valve dysfunction, during which levels of regurgitation are relatively low. Such medical management tends to focus on volume reductions, such as diuresis, for example, or afterload reducers, such as vasodilators, for example.

[007] Early attempts to surgically treat mitral valve dysfunction focused on replacement technologies. In many of these cases, the importance of preserving the native subvalvular apparatus was not fully appreciated and many patients often acquired ventricular dysfunction or failure following the surgery. Though later experience was more successful, significant limitations to valve replacement still exist. For instance, in the case of mechanical prostheses, lifelong therapy with powerful anticoagulants may be required to mitigate the thromboembolic potential of these devices. In the case of biologically derived devices, in particular those used as mitral valve replacements, the long-term durability may be limited. Mineralization induced valve failure is common within ten years, even in older patients. Thus, the use of such devices in younger patient groups is impractical.

[008] Another commonly employed repair technique involves the use of annuloplasty rings. These rings originally were used to stabilize a complex valve repair. Now, they are more often used alone to improve mitral valve function. An annuloplasty ring has a diameter that is less than the diameter of the enlarged valve annulus. The ring is placed in the valve annulus and the tissue of the annulus sewn or otherwise secured to the ring. This causes a reduction in

the annular circumference and an increase in the leaflet coaptation area. Such rings, however, generally flatten the natural saddle shape of the valve and hinder the natural contractility of the valve annulus. This may be true even when the rings have relatively high flexibility.

[009] To further reduce the limitations of the therapies described above, purely surgical techniques for treating valve dysfunction have evolved. Among these surgical techniques is the Alfieri stitch or so-called bowtie repair. In this surgery, a suture is placed substantially centrally across the valve orifice between the posterior and anterior leaflets to create leaflet apposition. Another surgical technique includes plication of the posterior annular space to reduce the cross-sectional area of the valve annulus. A limitation of each of these techniques is that they typically require opening the heart to gain direct access to the valve and the valve annulus. This generally necessitates the use of cardiopulmonary bypass, which may introduce additional morbidity and mortality to the surgical procedures. Additionally, for each of these procedures, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the efficacy of the repair prior to the conclusion of the operation.

[010] Due to these drawbacks, devising effective techniques that could improve valve function without the need for cardiopulmonary bypass and without requiring major remodeling of the valve may be advantageous. In particular, passive techniques to change the shape of the heart chamber and associated valve and/or reduce regurgitation while maintaining substantially normal leaflet motion may be desirable. Further, advantages may be obtained by a technique that reduces the overall time a patient is in surgery and under the influence of anesthesia. It also may be desirable to provide a technique for treating valve insufficiency that reduces the risk of bleeding associated with anticoagulation requirements of cardiopulmonary bypass. In addition, a technique that can be employed on a beating heart would allow the practitioner an opportunity to

assess the efficacy of the treatment and potentially address any inadequacies without the need for additional bypass support.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[011] A recently developed passive technique that addresses at least some of the drawbacks discussed above includes applying passive devices to the heart, for example the left ventricle, to change the shape of the ventricle and concomitantly to improve coaptation of the mitral valve leaflets. In one embodiment, the technique involves implanting splints across the left ventricle. Examples of various splinting approaches are disclosed in U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, filed October 6, 2000, entitled "Methods and Devices for the Improvement of Mitral Valve Function," which is assigned to the same assignee as the present application and which is incorporated by reference in its entirety herein.

[012] The devices and related methods which will be disclosed herein also operate passively to treat valve insufficiency, by altering the shape of the valve annulus and/or repositioning the papillary muscles, for example. Some of the devices of the present invention may be used in combination with the splinting treatments disclosed in U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated by reference herein.

[013] It should be understood that the invention disclosed herein could be practiced without performing one or more of the objects and/or advantages described above. Other aspects will become apparent from the detailed description which follows. As embodied and broadly described herein, the invention includes a method for treating a heart valve comprising providing a device having an arcuate portion and at least one elongate portion configured to extend from the arcuate portion. The method may further comprise encircling at least a portion of an annulus of a heart valve with the arcuate portion and adjusting a size of at least one of the arcuate portion and the elongate portion so

as to alter a shape of the portion of the annulus. The method also may include securing the at least one elongate portion to an exterior surface of the heart.

[014] According to another aspect, a method of treating a heart valve comprises providing a device having an arcuate portion and at least one elongate member configured to extend from the arcuate portion. The method further comprises placing the arcuate portion proximate an annulus of a heart valve and extending the at least one elongate member from the arcuate portion. The method also may comprise securing the at least one elongate member to an exterior surface of the heart, wherein the at least one elongate member extends from the arcuate portion to the heart wall in substantially the same plane as the arcuate portion.

[015] Yet another aspect includes a device for treating a heart valve comprising an arcuate portion configured to at least partly encircle an annulus of the heart valve and at least one elongate portion extending from the arcuate portion and configured to be secured to an exterior surface of a heart wall surrounding a heart chamber associated with the valve. At least one of the arcuate portion and the elongate portion is configured to be adjusted in size so as to alter a shape of at least a portion of the annulus.

[016] In yet another aspect, a device for treating a heart valve comprises an arcuate portion configured to be positioned proximate an annulus of the heart valve and at least one elongate member extending from the arcuate portion and configured to be secured to an exterior surface of the heart wall. The at least one elongate member extends from the arcuate portion to the heart wall in substantially the same plane as the arcuate portion.

[017] According to yet another aspect, the invention includes a device for treating a heart valve comprising at least one substantially elongate member configured to be implanted in a lumen of a coronary vessel so as to encircle at least a portion of an annulus of the heart valve and alter a shape of at least the

portion of the annulus. The device may further comprise a shape change element associated with the elongate member and configured to impart a local shape change to a portion of the valve annulus at a location corresponding to the shape change element.

[018] Yet another aspect includes a device for treating a heart valve comprising at least one substantially elongate member configured to be implanted in a lumen of a coronary vessel so as to encircle at least a portion of an annulus of the heart valve and alter a shape of at least the portion of the valve annulus. The shape of at least a portion of the elongate member may be configured to be adjustable so as to impart a local shape change to a portion of the valve annulus at a location corresponding to at least the adjustable portion.

[019] Yet another aspect of the invention includes a method for treating a heart valve comprising providing at least one substantially elongate member and extending at least a portion of the elongate member within a heart wall surrounding a chamber of the heart associated with the heart valve so as to encircle at least a portion of the heart chamber. The method may further comprise securing the elongate member in place with respect to the heart and compressing at least a portion of a heart wall surrounding at least the portion of the heart chamber so as to move leaflets of the valve toward each other so as to assist the valve in closing during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

[020] In yet another aspect, a method for treating a heart valve comprises providing at least one substantially elongate member and extending at least a portion of the elongate member within a lumen of a coronary sinus so as to encircle at least a portion of a heart chamber. The method further comprises securing the elongate member in place with respect to the heart via securement mechanisms and compressing at least a portion of a heart wall surrounding the portion of the heart chamber so as to move leaflets of the valve toward each

other so as to assist the valve in closing during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

[021] Yet another aspect of the invention includes a device for treating a heart valve comprising an elongate member having first and second oppositely disposed ends, with the elongate member being relatively rigid, a first anchoring member configured to be attached to the first end of the elongate member, and a second anchoring member configured to be attached to the second end of the elongate member. The first anchoring member may be configured to engage a first exterior surface of a wall of the heart and the second anchoring member may be configured to engage a second exterior surface of the wall of the heart to maintain a position of the elongate member transverse a heart chamber associated with the valve and substantially along a line of coaptation of the valve. The length of the elongate member may be such that the elongate member is capable of maintaining a substantially normal distance between trigones of the valve.

[022] In yet another aspect, a method for treating a heart valve comprises providing a relatively rigid elongate member having first and second oppositely disposed ends, securing the first end of the elongate member to a first exterior heart wall surface, and securing the second end of the elongate member to a second exterior heart wall surface, the second exterior surface being located substantially opposite to the first exterior surface such that the elongate member extends substantially transverse a heart chamber associated with the valve and substantially along a line of coaptation of the valve. The method also may comprise maintaining a substantially normal distance between the trigones of the valve via the elongate member.

[023] Yet another aspect of the invention includes a device for treating leakage of a heart valve comprising an expandable plug member having an external surface, with at least a portion of the plug member being configured to

be positioned proximate leaflets of the heart valve. The device also may comprise a securement mechanism attached to the plug member and configured to secure the plug member with respect to the heart such that during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle, the leaflets abut the external surface of the plug member to restrict bloodflow through the valve.

[024] According to another aspect, a device for treating leakage of a heart valve comprises a plug member having a piston-like configuration and an external surface being configured to abut free ends of leaflets of the valve to restrict bloodflow through the valve during at least the portion of the cardiac cycle. The device may further comprise a securement mechanism attached to the plug member and configured to secure the plug member with respect to the heart.

[025] Yet another aspect of the invention includes a method of preventing leakage in a heart valve comprising providing an expandable plug member having an external surface, delivering the plug member to a heart chamber containing a valve, and positioning the plug member proximate leaflets of the valve such that the leaflets contact the external surface of the plug member during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle so as to restrict bloodflow through the valve.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[026] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention and together with the description, serve to explain certain principles. In the drawings,

[027] Fig. 1a is a short-axis cross-sectional view of the heart;

[028] Fig. 1b is a partial short axis cross-sectional view of the heart;

[029] Fig. 2a is a top view of a properly functioning mitral valve in an open position;

[030] Fig. 2b is a top view of a properly functioning mitral valve in a closed position;

[031] Fig. 2c is a top view of an improperly functioning mitral valve in a "closed" position;

[032] Fig. 3a is a side view of a properly functioning mitral valve shown with its connection to the papillary muscles;

[033] Fig. 3b is a side view of an improperly functioning mitral valve shown with its connection to the papillary muscles;

[034] Fig. 4a is a cross-sectional view of a mitral valve and a coronary sinus with an exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member implanted in the coronary sinus according to an aspect of the invention;

[035] Fig. 4b is a cross-sectional view of another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member implanted in a coronary sinus according to an aspect of the invention;

[036] Fig. 4c is a perspective view of yet another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member implanted in a coronary sinus according to an aspect of the invention;

[037] Fig. 4d is a perspective view of yet another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member for implantation in a coronary sinus according to an optional aspect of the invention;

[038] Fig. 4e is a perspective view of yet another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member for implantation in a coronary sinus according to an aspect of the invention;

[039] Fig. 4f is a perspective view of yet another embodiment of a curved frame member for implantation in a coronary sinus according to an aspect of the invention;

[040] Fig. 4g is a perspective view of the curved frame member of Fig. 4f in a curved configuration;

[041] Fig. 4h is a perspective view of yet another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member according to an aspect of the invention;

[042] Fig. 4i is a perspective view of the curved frame member of Fig. 4h in a curved configuration;

[043] Fig. 5a is a long axis, partial, cross-sectional view of a heart with a snare device delivered to the mitral valve according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

[044] Fig. 5b is a short axis, cross-sectional view of a heart with filaments delivered to the mitral valve and captured by the snare device of Fig. 5a according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

[045] Fig. 5c is a long axis, partial, cross-sectional view of a heart with the filaments of Fig. 5b drawn through the left atrium by the snare device according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

[046] Fig. 5d is a short axis, cross-sectional view of a heart showing an embodiment of a floating ring device implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an optional aspect of the invention;

[047] Fig. 5e is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a floating ring device according to an aspect of the invention;

[048] Fig. 6a is a short axis cross-sectional view of a heart showing an exemplary embodiment of an annular noose implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[049] Fig. 6b is a cross-sectional view of a mitral valve with another exemplary embodiment of an annular noose implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[050] Fig. 6c is a cross-sectional view of a mitral valve with yet another exemplary embodiment of an annular noose implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[051] Fig. 6d is a short axis cross-sectional view of a heart with another exemplary embodiment of an annular noose implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[052] Fig. 6e is a short axis cross-sectional view of a heart with another exemplary embodiment of an annular noose according to an aspect of the invention;

[053] Fig. 7a is a short axis, cross-sectional view of a heart showing an exemplary embodiment of an elongate bar and a snare device around the elongate bar implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[054] Fig. 7b is a short axis, cross-sectional view of a heart showing an embodiment of an internal strut device implanted to treat the mitral valve according to an optional aspect of the present invention;

[055] Fig. 8 is a short axis, cross-sectional view of a heart implanted with an exemplary embodiment of an intrawall splint according to an aspect of the invention;

[056] Fig. 9 is a partial perspective view of a heart implanted with an exemplary embodiment of an external plication device according to an aspect of the invention;

[057] Fig. 10a is a schematic side view of an improperly functioning mitral valve during systole;

[058] Fig. 10b is a schematic side view of the valve of Fig. 10a with an exemplary embodiment of a plug device implanted in the valve orifice according to an aspect of the invention;

[059] Fig. 11a is an exemplary embodiment of a spherical plug device implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[060] Fig. 11b is an exemplary embodiment of an ellipsoidal plug device implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[061] Fig. 11c is an exemplary embodiment of a disk-shaped plug device implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[062] Fig. 11d is an exemplary embodiment of a wing-shaped plug device implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[063] Fig. 11e is an exemplary embodiment of a sheet-like plug device implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[064] Fig. 11f is an exemplary embodiment of an inflatable sheet-like plug device configured to be implanted in the valve orifice between the valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[065] Fig. 11g(i) is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of collapsible tube plug device in its expanded configuration according to an aspect of the invention;

[066] Fig. 11g(ii) is a perspective view of the collapsible tube plug device of Fig. 11g(i) in its collapsed configuration according to an aspect of the invention;

[067] Fig. 11h(i) is another exemplary embodiment of a collapsible plug device in its expanded configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[068] Fig. 11h(ii) shows the collapsible plug device of Fig. 11h(i) in its collapsed configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[069] Fig. 11i(i) is yet another exemplary embodiment of a collapsible plug device in its expanded configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[070] Fig. 11i(ii) shows the collapsible plug device of Fig. 11i(i) in its collapsed configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[071] Fig. 11j(i) is yet another exemplary embodiment of a collapsible plug device in its expanded configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[072] Fig. 11j(ii) shows the collapsible plug device of Fig. 11j(i) in its collapsed configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[073] Fig. 11k is an exemplary embodiment of a piston-like plug device implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[074] Fig. 11l(i) is another exemplary embodiment of a piston-like plug device shown in a collapsed configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[075] Fig. 11l(ii) shows the piston-like plug device of Fig. 11l(i) shown in an expanded configuration implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[076] Fig. 11m(i) is yet another exemplary embodiment of a plug device shown implanted in the heart during systole according to an aspect of the invention;

[077] Fig. 11m(ii) shows the plug device of Fig. 11m(i) shown implanted in the heart during diastole according to an aspect of the invention;

[078] Fig. 12 is a partial perspective view of the heart showing a plug device implanted in the heart according to an optional aspect of the invention;

[079] Fig. 13a is a long axis cross-sectional view of the left ventricle and left atrium of a heart showing schematically various exemplary positions for a plug device according to an optional aspect of the invention;

[080] Fig. 13b is a long axis cross-sectional view of the left ventricle and left atrium of a heart showing schematically various exemplary positions for a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[081] Fig. 13c is a basal cut away cross-sectional view of the heart showing schematically various exemplary positions for a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[082] Fig. 13d is a long axis cross-sectional view of the left ventricle and left atrium of a heart showing schematically an exemplary position for a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[083] Fig. 14a is a partial perspective view of the left ventricle and left atrium of a heart showing an exemplary embodiment of a needle and stylet assembly for delivering a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[084] Fig. 14b is a long axis cross-sectional view of the heart showing the placement of the needle and stylet assembly of Fig. 14a relative to the mitral valve leaflets according to an aspect of the invention;

[085] Fig. 14c is a partial perspective view of the left ventricle and left atrium with a leader assembly and sheath retaining a plug device being advanced through the needle of Fig. 14a according to an aspect of the invention;

[086] Fig. 14d is a partial perspective view of the left ventricle and left atrium showing an exemplary embodiment of a sheath retaining a plug device being advanced through the heart according to an aspect of the invention;

[087] Fig. 14e is a partial short axis cross-sectional view of the heart during systole viewed from the top and showing an exemplary embodiment of a plug device implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[088] Fig. 14f is a partial short axis cross-sectional view of the heart during diastole viewed from the top and showing an exemplary embodiment of a plug device implanted in the valve according to an aspect of the invention;

[089] Fig. 15a is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a trocar and needle assembly for delivery of a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[090] Fig. 15b is a perspective view of the trocar and needle assembly of Fig. 15a with an exemplary embodiment of a pusher assembly used to advance an anchor of a plug device out of the trocar and needle assembly according to an aspect of the invention;

[091] Fig. 15c is a perspective view of the trocar and needle assembly of Fig. 15a with an exemplary embodiment of plug member advanced out of the trocar and needle assembly according to an aspect of the invention;

[092] Fig. 16a is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a plug device with a plug member in a folded configuration according to an aspect of the invention;

[093] Fig. 16b is a partial perspective view of a left ventricle and left atrium with the plug device of Fig. 16a delivered to the heart in a folded configuration according to an aspect of the invention;

[094] Fig. 16c is a partial perspective view of a left ventricle and left atrium showing an exemplary embodiment for unfolding the plug member of Fig. 16a according to an aspect of the invention;

[095] Fig. 16d is a partial perspective view of a left ventricle and left atrium showing the plug device of Fig. 16a implanted in the heart in an unfolded configuration according to an aspect of the invention;

[096] Fig. 17a is a cross-sectional view of the heart showing an exemplary embodiment of an endovascular delivery path for delivering a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[097] Fig. 17b is a cross-sectional view of the heart showing another exemplary embodiment of an endovascular delivery path for delivering a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[098] Fig. 17c is a cross-sectional view of the heart showing yet another exemplary embodiment of an endovascular delivery path for delivering a plug device according to an aspect of the invention;

[099] Fig. 18a is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a plug device and anchoring frame according to an aspect of the invention;

[0100] Fig. 18b is a long axis partial cross-sectional view of the heart showing an exemplary embodiment of the implantation of the plug device and anchoring frame of Fig. 18a according to an aspect of the invention;

[0101] Fig. 19 is a long axis partial cross-sectional view of the heart showing an exemplary embodiment of an inflation device and a plug device having an inflatable plug member and anchors according to an aspect of the invention; and

[0102] Fig. 20 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of an inflatable plug device according to an aspect of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0103] Certain aspects of the invention that will be discussed herein generally pertain to devices and methods for treating valve insufficiency arising from heart conditions, including, for example, ventricle dilatation, valve incompetencies, congenital defects, and other conditions. The various devices to be described may operate passively in that, once implanted in the heart, they do not require an active stimulus, either mechanical, electrical, or otherwise, to function. Implanting one or more of the devices of the present invention may assist in closing a valve to prevent regurgitation by, for example, assisting in the proper coaptation of the heart valve leaflets, either against one another or independently against another surface. Assisting this coaptation may be

accomplished by directly geometrically altering the shape of the dysfunctional mitral valve annulus; by repositioning one or both of the papillary muscles to a more normal state, and/or by otherwise facilitating annular contraction during systole. In addition, these devices may be placed in conjunction with other devices that, or may themselves function to, alter the shape or geometry of one or more heart ventricles, locally and/or globally, and thereby further increase the heart's efficiency. That is, the heart may experience an increased pumping efficiency and concomitant reduction in stress on the heart walls through an alteration in the shape or geometry of one or more of the ventricles and through an improvement in valve function.

[0104] The inventive devices and related methods may offer numerous advantages over the existing treatments for various valve insufficiencies. The devices are relatively easy to manufacture and use, and the surgical techniques and tools for implanting the devices of the present invention do not require the invasive procedures of current surgical techniques. For instance, the surgical techniques do not require removing portions of the heart tissue, nor do they necessarily require opening the heart chamber or stopping the heart during operation. All of the techniques described may be performed without placing the patient on cardiopulmonary bypass, which, as discussed above, is routinely required for conventional procedures to repair and/or replace the mitral valve. Avoiding placing the patient on cardiopulmonary bypass may permit the inventive devices and related methods to be adjusted "real time" so as to optimize the performance of the valve. Furthermore, the inventive devices and related methods may avoid the need to place the patient on long-term anticoagulation, which currently is required for many current valve repair techniques. For these reasons, the surgical techniques for implanting the devices of the present invention also are less risky to the patient than other techniques. The less invasive nature of the surgical techniques and tools of the present invention may

also allow for earlier intervention in patients with heart failure and/or valve incompetencies.

[0105] Although many of the methods and devices are discussed below in connection with their use in the left ventricle and for the mitral valve of the heart, these methods and devices may be used in other chambers and for other valves of the heart for similar purposes. The left ventricle and the mitral valve have been selected for illustrative purposes because a large number of the disorders that the present invention treats occur in connection with the mitral valve. Furthermore, as will be shown, certain devices disclosed herein for improving valve function can be used either as stand-alone devices (i.e., solely for treatment of valve insufficiency) or in conjunction with other devices for changing the shape of a heart chamber or otherwise reducing heart wall stress.

[0106] Reference will now be made in detail to some optional embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts.

[0107] Fig. 1a is a short-axis cross-sectional view of the heart illustrating the mitral valve MV in relation to the other valves of the heart, namely, the aortic valve AO, the tricuspid valve TV, and the pulmonary valve PV. The mitral valve has two leaflets, an anterior leaflet A and a posterior leaflet P. The anterior leaflet A is adjacent the aorta, AO, and the posterior leaflet P is opposite the aorta AO. An annulus AN surrounds the mitral valve leaflets. Fig. 1b is a partial short-axis cross-sectional view showing the mitral valve MV in relation to the coronary sinus CS. The coronary sinus CS wraps around a significant portion of the posterior aspect of the mitral valve annulus AN. The ostium OS of the coronary sinus CS drains into the right atrium RA.

[0108] In Figs. 2a and 2b, a top view of a properly functioning mitral valve MV is shown. Fig. 2a shows the valve MV in its open position during diastole in

which the posterior leaflet P is separated from the anterior leaflet A. Portions of the chordae C also can be seen in Fig. 2a. Fig. 2b shows the properly functioning mitral valve MV in the closed position during systole. In this figure, the anterior leaflet A and the posterior leaflet P contact one another along a line of coaptation to close the mitral valve MV and prevent blood from flowing through the valve MV from the left atrium to the left ventricle.

[0109] Fig. 2c shows a top view of an improperly functioning mitral valve MV in the "closed" position (i.e., during systole). In Fig. 2c, the anterior leaflet A and the posterior leaflet P do not properly co-apt when the valve MV is in the closed position. This may be caused by, for example, a dilatation of the annulus AN caused by an enlargement of the left ventricle, or other similar mechanisms discussed above. As shown in Fig. 2c, this improper coaptation prevents the complete closure of the orifice O between the valve leaflets, thereby permitting blood to leak through the valve from the left ventricle to the left atrium during systole. In other words, although the mitral valve is in a contracted state, it is not actually closed so as to prevent blood flow therethrough since the leaflets are prevented from completely coming together.

[0110] Fig. 3a shows a side view of a properly functioning mitral valve in the closed position with the valve leaflets L properly coapted so as to prevent blood flow through the valve. Fig. 3b shows a side view of an improperly functioning mitral valve in which the valve leaflets L are not properly coapted due to, for example, dislocation of the papillary muscles PM. Such dislocation of the papillary muscles also may be caused by enlargement of the left ventricle, for example. The arrows in Fig. 3a show the movement of the papillary muscles PM down and to the right resulting from such ventricle dilatation.

[0111] Such dysfunctioning valves, as shown in Figs. 2c and 3b, may cause a reduction in forward stroke volume from the left ventricle. Also, a blood flow reversal into the pulmonary veins may occur. Mitral valve regurgitation may

also arise from a combination of valve annulus dilation and papillary muscle dislocation.

[0112] It should be noted that dilatation of the left ventricle represents an example of a condition that can lead to improper valve function. Other conditions, discussed above, also may cause such valve dysfunction, and the devices and techniques discussed herein can be used to treat valve insufficiencies caused by these conditions.

[0113] Exemplary embodiments of a device for treating the mitral valve via a change in shape of the valve annulus, which may include a reduction in the effective circumference of the valve annulus, are shown in Figs 4a-4i. The devices of Figs. 4a-4i may be implanted on a beating heart, without the need for cardiopulmonary bypass. The devices of Figs. 4a-4i comprise curved frame members configured to be inserted into the coronary sinus to effect a shape change of the posterior aspect of the mitral valve annulus. In certain embodiments, as will be discussed, the frame members include mechanisms that allow for creating a focused shape change at selected locations along a portion of the mitral valve annulus adjacent the frame members. That is, the frame members may allow for differing shape change effects along the length of the frame member. The ability to selectively alter the shape in one region of the annulus differently than another region may be particularly advantageous when treating patients whose mitral valve insufficiency has arisen from local myocardial ischemia or infarction, since such patients may experience relatively localized geometrical alterations of the mitral valve annulus, as opposed to an overall radial increase of the annulus.

[0114] As shown in Fig. 4a, a curved frame member 110a is configured to be delivered endovascularly to and implanted in the coronary sinus CS. The origin of the coronary sinus CS is located in the wall of the right atrium (not shown), and may be accessed by, for example, catheterization of the femoral,

jugular, or subclavian veins, so as to endovascularly implant the frame member 110a. Alternatively, the frame member 110a could be implanted via a surgical approach. In any case, the frame member 110a may be positioned in the coronary sinus CS proximate the posterior aspect of the mitral valve annulus, as shown in Fig. 4a. In this position, the frame 110a may be used to alter the shape of the posterior aspect of the valve annulus, creating a configuration that effectively reduces the annular circumference and/or creates a greater degree of coaptation between the anterior and posterior leaflets A, P. Alternatively, the frame member 110a may be used to stabilize the shape of the posterior aspect of the valve annulus, thereby substantially preventing continued dilation or deformation of the valve annulus.

[0115] The frame member 110a may be made of a substantially rigid material such that the frame member 110a can be bent or otherwise formed into the desired shape and placed within the coronary sinus CS, causing the annulus of the mitral valve MV, or portions thereof, to change shape. The frame member 110a may engage within the coronary sinus CS via a friction fit to maintain its position within the coronary sinus CS. A further alternative is to fabricate the frame member 110a of a shape memory material, such as nickel-titanium alloy, for example. In this manner, the frame member 110a may be chilled prior to implantation such that it has some flexibility. This may permit the frame member 110a to be introduced into the coronary sinus CS in a relatively atraumatic manner. Once in place, the blood may warm the frame member 110a, causing a shape change to a preformed initial shape. This shape change of the frame member 110a may in turn alter the shape of the coronary sinus CS and thus the valve annulus.

[0116] As shown in Fig. 4b, one or both ends of the frame member 110a may exit the coronary sinus CS and anchor assemblies 105 may be provided on the ends of the frame member 110a. This may allow the frame member 110a to

impart a shape change to the valve annulus beyond the somewhat limited extent of the coronary sinus CS around the posterior aspect of the valve. The frame member 110a may be anchored to an exterior surface of the heart wall via the anchor assemblies 105. The ends of the frame member 110a may puncture through the coronary sinus CS to pass externally and allow connection of the anchor assemblies 105 to the exterior surface of the heart. The anchor assemblies 105 may be in the form of anchor pads. Some examples of such anchor pads are described in U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated above. The anchor assemblies 105 may be sutured, or secured by other similar attachment mechanisms, such as by providing a surface of the anchor assemblies 105 with a tissue ingrowth promoting material, to an exterior surface of the heart wall to hold the frame 110a in place with respect thereto. To further facilitate obtaining the desired shape change of the mitral valve annulus, the anchor assemblies 105 may be positionable along the length of the frame member 110 prior to fixation of the frame member 110 with respect to the heart or the frame member 110 may have a variable length. For example, the frame member 110a may be provided with a telescoping mechanism or the like.

[0117] In yet another exemplary embodiment, as shown in Fig. 4c, the frame member 110c may be configured to anchor itself into the vessel wall in order to maintain its position. For example, in the optional configuration shown in Fig. 4c, the frame member 110c is provided with barbs 111 along its length. The frame member 110c may be delivered endovascularly such that the barbs 111 do not engage the wall of the coronary sinus CS. Once the frame member 110c is placed within the coronary sinus CS in the desired position, it may be manipulated, for example, by rotation or by moving the frame member 110c in a direction opposite to the direction of advancement through the coronary sinus CS, so as to engage the barbs 111 with the coronary sinus wall. This engagement helps to maintain the position of the frame member 110c.

[0118] Fig. 4d shows another embodiment of a curved frame member 110d configured to be implanted in the coronary sinus CS for treating the mitral valve. In this embodiment, the frame member 110d may support a shape change element 106 configured to move along a length of the frame member 110d. The shape change element 106 may be configured to protrude radially with respect to the frame 110d, thereby providing a more localized shape change in an area along the posterior aspect of the mitral valve. A desired location for the shape change may be determined by moving the shape change element 106 along the length of the frame member 110d to a particular position and viewing the effects on mitral valve function through real-time imaging techniques. The shape change element 106 also may be detachable from the frame member 110d for easy removal from the frame member 110d if the localized shape change is no longer desired. The shape change element 101 may be mechanically detachable or it may be detached electrolytically in a manner similar to the detachment mechanism of the Guglielmi detachable coil. A delivery tool, which may be in the form of a delivery wire 106', may be used to deliver the shape change element 101 over the frame member 110d.

[0119] Fig. 4e shows another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame for insertion into the coronary sinus proximate the posterior aspect of the mitral valve. In this embodiment, the frame member 110e serves as a support for an adjustable shape change member 107. As an example, the curved frame 110e may define at least one slot 108 extending along at least part of the length of the frame 110e. A moveable pin 109 may engage with the slot 108 so as to slide along the length of the slot 108. A wire 112 may extend along the portion of the curved frame 110e that lies adjacent the posterior aspect of the mitral valve annulus. The wire 112 may have one end attached to the pin 109 and an opposite end attached at an end of the frame 110e substantially opposite to the moveable pin 109. For example, as shown in Fig. 4e, the wire 112 may be

attached to a fixed pin 109'. Alternatively, the wire may attach directly to the frame member 110e. Upon movement of the pin 109 toward a center of the frame member 110e, the wire 112 curves, forming a bulge that causes the mitral valve annulus to change shape.

[0120] The frame member 110e optionally may have two pins disposed at opposite ends of the frame in either a single slot running substantially the entire length of the frame 110e or two different slots disposed at substantially opposite ends of the frame 110e. In an exemplary embodiment, both of the pins 109, 109' shown in Fig. 4e, may be moveable. In either case, the movement of one pin or both pins may cause the wire 112 to bulge outward, thereby imparting a variable degree of shape change to the mitral valve annulus. Preferably, the wire 112 is sufficiently flexible so as to permit bending of the wire due to the movement of the pin 109 within the slot 108. However, the wire 112 also should be sufficiently rigid so as to maintain its bulged configuration and cause the desired shape change and/or repositioning of the valve annulus and/or papillary muscles.

[0121] Figs. 4f and 4g illustrate yet another exemplary embodiment of a curved frame member 110f for implanting in the coronary sinus to alter the shape of the mitral valve annulus. Fig. 4f is a perspective view of the frame member 110f, which is formed from segments 113 configured to rotate relative to each other. Rotating the segments 113 about their respective longitudinal axes and relative to each other may alter the curvature of the frame 110f along its length so as to produce various degrees of curvature in particular locations as desired. Such curvature of the frame member 110f is illustrated in Fig. 4g. As a direct surgical implant, the curved frame member 110f can have its segments 113 individually manipulated via direct rotation to achieve a desired final shape prior to insertion into the coronary sinus CS. A wire (not shown) extending down the

center of the segments 113 may hold the segments 113 in their final desired configuration, for example, due to frictional engagement.

[0122] In another contemplated embodiment, shown in Figs. 4h and 4i, a curved frame member 110h may comprise an actuation mechanism 90 attached to a portion of the frame member 110h. For example, the actuation mechanism 90 may be attached to a distal end of the frame member 110h. The frame member 110h may be formed of a plurality of substantially wedge-shaped segments 95. Actuating the actuation mechanism 90, by, for example, pulling mechanism 90 proximally, causes the distal end to retract so as to change the shape of the frame member 110h, as shown in Fig. 4i. This in turn may alter the shape of the mitral valve annulus when the frame member 110h is implanted in the coronary sinus CS. The actuation mechanism 90 may comprise a pull-actuated wire attached to a distal end of the frame member, as shown in Figs. 4h and 4i, or alternatively to an anchor assembly provided on the distal end of the frame member. The desired final shape of the frame member 110h may reduce or enlarge a radius of curvature of the valve annulus, or a combination of both, i.e., increasing the curvature in some regions and decreasing the curvature in other regions.

[0123] The various curved frame devices of Figs. 4a-4i may be configured to be implanted on a beating heart. Optionally, the frame devices may be implanted during an open chest or minimally invasive thoracic surgical procedure. For example, the frame member may be directly inserted into the coronary sinus through an incision in either the right atrium or the coronary sinus. In an alternative exemplary embodiment, the frame devices could be implanted endovascularly into the coronary sinus using catheter-based delivery techniques. For example, a catheter may be inserted into either the jugular vein or the vena cava and into the right atrium and then the coronary sinus.

[0124] Figs. 5a-5e show an exemplary embodiment of a floating ring device for treating mitral valve dysfunction by altering the shape of the mitral valve annulus. The floating ring device according to the invention may be implanted into the region of the mitral valve annulus itself (either above, at, or below the annulus) in order to effect the desired shape change of the mitral valve annulus.

[0125] A short axis cross-sectional view of the heart implanted with an exemplary embodiment of a floating ring device 115 is shown in Fig. 5d. The device comprises a semi-flexible ring 116 configured to be placed in the left atrium LA, proximate the mitral valve annulus. A plurality of tightening members 117, which may have the form of tension members, are secured to the ring 116. An anchor mechanism, for example in the form of a pad 118, attaches to the free end of each tightening member 117 opposite to the ring 116. The anchor pads 118 are adapted to be secured to the tightening members 117 and placed externally of the heart wall, for example on the posterior wall of the left atrium LA, to secure the floating ring device 115 in place with respect to the heart. Prior to securing the anchor pads 118 to the tightening members 117, the tightening members 117 may be tightened (i.e., their lengths between the valve annulus and heart wall altered) until the desired annular shape of the mitral valve is obtained. The tightening members 117 may be individually tightened to produce differing effects on the shape of the mitral valve annulus depending on the position around the annulus. The flexibility of the ring 116 also may assist in producing a varying effect on the mitral valve annulus geometry. It is contemplated that sutures or other attachment mechanisms may be employed instead of the anchor pads 118 to secure the tightening members 117 to the heart wall once the desired tensioning of the tightening members 117 has been achieved.

[0126] Referring to Figs. 5a-5d, an exemplary delivery technique for implanting a floating ring device will be described. The technique described preferably is performed on a beating heart. As shown in Fig. 5a, a snare 119 is first delivered through a relatively small incision in the wall of the appendage of the left atrium LA. As an example, the incision may be made at a location superior to the mitral valve MV. A trocar (not shown) also may assist in the delivery of the snare 119 through the incision. The snare 119 comprises a loop portion 119a at a distal end of the device and a handling portion 119b extending from the loop portion 119a. The handling portion 119b forms a proximal end of the snare 119. The handling portion 119b may extend out of the left atrium upon deployment of the snare 119 within the heart. According to an alternative aspect, the snare 119 may be delivered through the venous system to the right atrium (not shown) and then into the left atrium LA via the atrial septum. In either case, once the snare 119 is delivered into the left atrium LA, the loop portion 119a may be positioned with its perimeter resting on substantially the outermost edges of the mitral valve annulus AN.

[0127] After appropriately positioning the snare 119 with respect to the mitral valve annulus AN, a plurality of tightening members 117, which may have a substantially filament-like structure, may be inserted from external the heart, through the wall of the left atrium LA, and into the left atrial chamber. For example, as shown in Fig. 5b, a hollow, needle-like delivery tool 300 may be used to insert the tightening members 117 through the heart wall by inserting the delivery tool 300 carrying the tightening members 117 through the heart wall and ejecting the members 117 out of the delivery tool 300.

[0128] As shown in Fig. 5b, the tightening members 117 may be positioned along the posterior aspect of the mitral valve MV approximately at the level of the mitral valve annulus AN. As the tightening members 117 are inserted into the atrial chamber, they may be carried through the snare loop 119a via the

blood flowing from the left atrium LA through the mitral valve MV and to the left ventricle LV. To facilitate delivery of the tightening members 117, especially with regard to their insertion through the heart wall, the tightening members 117 optionally may be attached to needles which penetrate the heart wall first. In this case, the bloodflow would carry the needles with the tightening members 117 attached from the left atrium LA and through the snare loop portion 119a.

[0129] Once the tightening members 117 have been drawn through the snare loop portion 119a, the snare 119 may then be retracted and the tightening members 117 captured within the loop portion 119a. By pulling proximally on the handling member 119b, the snare 119 with the captured tightening members 117 may be retrieved from the left atrium LA. As shown in Fig. 5c, the free ends of the tightening members 117 may be pulled out of the left atrium appendage through the incision previously made to insert the snare device 119. The snare device 119 may be removed from the tightening members 117 once they are pulled out of the left atrium LA.

[0130] The free ends of the tightening members 117 may then be secured to the flexible ring 116, for example, by tying the ends to the ring. The flexible ring 116 may then be reinserted into the left atrium LA by pulling on the tightening members 117 at their respective insertion points in the left atrial wall. Thus, the flexible ring 116 may be inserted through the same delivery path that was used to insert the snare 119.

[0131] The flexible ring 116 preferably has enough flexibility so as to permit insertion of the ring 116 into a trocar and/or an incision made in the left atrial appendage and through the left atrium LA. Furthermore, the ring 116 and the tightening members 117 preferably are covered with a hemocompatible material, such as expanded PTFE, for example. This covering may facilitate the endothelialization of any portion of the ring 116 and tightening members 117 residing in the blood flow path near the mitral valve.

[0132] After tightening each tightening member 117 to a desired amount, a securing mechanism, such as the anchor pads 118 shown in Fig. 5d, may secure the tightening members 117 externally to the heart wall. Depending on the position and number of tightening members 117, and the relative degree of tightening of each, various annular geometries of the mitral valve may be obtained. Echocardiographic visualization may be employed to assist in adjusting the floating ring device. For example, the device can be selectively tightened in various locations and/or to various degrees until minimal or no mitral valve regurgitation is observed using the echocardiographic visualization.

[0133] A further exemplary embodiment of a floating ring device is illustrated in Fig. 5e. In this embodiment, the anterior-most pairs of tightening members 117e are relatively rigid. A single elongate anchor pad 118e connects to the ends of each of the pairs of tightening members 117e. In this manner, the position of the ring 116 over the central portion of the mitral valve may be maintained, even as the posterior-oriented tightening members 117e are tightened.

[0134] Yet another optional embodiment of a device for treating the mitral valve is illustrated in Figs. 6a-6d. The device shown in these figures is referred to herein as an "annular noose," so-named due to its noose-like configuration. The annular noose 120 is formed from a flexible rope-like member 121. The member 121 may be made of a braided polyester, or other similar material, that allows the member 121 to flex without forming kinks and/or permanent bends. The rope-like member 121 is shaped into a loop portion 122 that is placed around the exterior of the left atrium (not shown), as close as possible to the atrioventricular groove (not shown), and in substantially the same plane as the mitral valve annulus AN. It may be necessary for the portion between the anterior leaflet and the aorta to be passed through the tissue of the left atrium. An adjusting mechanism manipulable from external the heart, such as a cinch

ring 125, for example, may be used to adjust the size of the loop portion 122 and secure the free ends 123a, 123b of the member 121 that extend from the loop portion 122. After the loop portion 122 has been properly positioned with respect to the mitral valve annulus AN, the cinch ring 125 may be tightened, thereby permitting a reduction in the circumference of the mitral valve annulus AN.

[0135] Figs. 6b and 6c show various elements that may be used in conjunction with the annular noose 120 of Fig. 6a so as to provide a more focused geometrical shape change in selected regions of the mitral valve. For example, as shown in both Figs. 6b and 6c, a relatively rigid member 126 may be placed over the flexible member 121. In the optional embodiment shown in Figs. 6b and 6c, the relatively rigid member 126 has a tubular configuration that may be advanced over either of the free ends of the flexible member 121 and positioned as desired along the loop portion 122. Alternatively, the relatively rigid member 126 may be permanently secured to the loop portion 122 of the flexible member 121. In the embodiment of Figs. 6b, the annular noose 120, with the relatively rigid member 126 disposed thereon, is positioned with respect to the mitral valve MV such that the relatively rigid member 126 rests by the anterior leaflet side of the mitral valve MV. This placement may permit a more focused circumferential reduction to take place at a location proximate the posterior leaflet, since this portion is more flexible and will tend to draw the noose down as it is tightened.

[0136] Fig. 6c shows another embodiment of an element for use in conjunction with the annular noose 120. A shape change securing pad 127 may be used for adjusting the size of the loop portion 122 and for securing the free ends 123a, 123b. As shown in Fig. 6c, the shape change pad 127 may have a substantially disk-like configuration with a central, substantially longitudinal passage through which the ends 123a, 123b of the flexible member 121 extend. A securing pin 128 may operate to move toward and away from the center of the

pad to pass through the flexible members ends 123a, 123b and secure the annular noose 120 into position. A surface 129 of the pad 127 that faces the mitral valve annulus may have a substantially non-concave profile, for example the surface 129 may be either convex or flat. When the pad 127 is moved so as to tighten the annular noose 120, the pad 127 may press against the mitral valve annulus and thereby cause a relatively focused shape change in the region of the pad 127.

[0137] As shown in Fig. 6d, a plurality of pads 127 may be used to change the shape of the mitral valve in the regions of the mitral valve proximate the pads. Such a focused change may permit increased co-aptation of the valve leaflets in the various regions of the focused shape change. The shape change pad 127 and the relatively rigid member 126 may be used either in combination, as shown in Fig. 6c, or individually to create a focused shape change of the mitral valve. Such a focused shape change is in addition to the overall circumferential reduction achieved by the annular noose 120 alone.

[0138] Fig. 6e illustrates an alternative exemplary embodiment of a noose device. The noose device in Fig. 6e comprises a relatively rigid member 126e, similar to the relatively rigid member 126 of Fig. 6b. The member 126e is positioned on the posterior side of the mitral valve MV. Preferably, the rigid member 126e, which is placed on the loop portion 122, may be formed by bending or the like to a desired shape so as to impart a desired shape change to the posterior annulus. The rigid member 126e can be of any desired shape, and may include one or more local regions of indentations.

[0139] Another aspect of the present invention includes an internal strut device that operates to treat mitral valve dysfunction by causing a shape change to the mitral valve annulus while maintaining or restoring the normal distance between the trigones of the valve. The device also may move the posterior leaflet face closer to the anterior leaflet face. Combined, these movements tend

to increase the coaptation area of the mitral valve leaflets and improve mitral valve function. An exemplary embodiment of an internal strut device is shown in Figs. 7a and 7b.

[0140] The embodiment of the internal strut device shown in Figs. 7a and 7b generally comprises a relatively rigid elongate member 130 positioned so as to extend substantially along the line of leaflet coaptation of the mitral valve. The relatively rigid elongate member 130 may be positioned in close proximity to the valve annulus AN, either slightly above or slightly below the annulus AN, so as to appropriately affect the valve leaflets and move them into a desired position. A second elongate member 136 may be provided so as to extend substantially perpendicular to the relatively rigid elongate member 130 and to the line of leaflet coaptation. The relatively rigid elongate member 130 may be fixed to the outer walls of the left atrium or the left ventricle, depending on the positioning of the member 130 with respect to the mitral valve MV. Sutures, anchor pads, or other similar mechanisms may secure the member 130 with respect to the leaf. Figs. 7a and 7b illustrate the use of anchor pads 132 for securing the relatively rigid, elongate member 130.

[0141] Providing a relatively rigid elongate member 130 may substantially prevent the member from bending or buckling, which may in turn help to maintain the desired trigonal distance. The member 130 may be a rigid bar made from biocompatible metals, such as nitinol, titanium, chrome-alloys, MP-35N, and other similar metals, or from biocompatible polymers, such as PEEK, acetyl, or other similar materials. Optionally, the bar may be an extendable, telescoping bar (not shown). This may permit the length of the bar to be adjusted as necessary to optimize the trigonal distance.

[0142] The second elongate member 136 may optionally be in the form of a snare having a loop portion 136a that is secured around the relatively rigid member 130. The snare may be tightened as desired and the free end 136b

may be secured via an anchor pad 134 placed adjacent an exterior surface of the heart wall. Once secured, the snare essentially forms a tension member anchored at one end to the relatively rigid member 130 and at the opposite end to the heart wall. Together, the relatively rigid member 130 and the second elongate member 136 impart a shape change to the mitral valve annulus, while maintaining the distance between the valve trigones T. Alternatively, the distance between the valve trigones also may be altered to achieve a more normal distance between them if necessary.

[0143] An exemplary embodiment for the delivery and implantation of the internal strut device of Figs. 7a and 7b will now be explained. An introducer 138, such as a trocar or other suitable introducer mechanism, may be inserted through the heart wall proximate the level of the mitral valve annulus AN. As shown in Fig. 7a, the introducer 138 may be inserted in a substantially perpendicular direction relative to the line of coaptation of the mitral valve leaflets. Once the introducer is inserted, the second elongate member 136, in the form of a snare in Figs. 7a and 7b, may be inserted through the introducer 138 and positioned with the loop portion 136a substantially in the middle of the mitral valve annulus AN. The relatively rigid elongate member 130 may then be inserted through the left atrial wall (not shown) at approximately the same annular level as the snare 136. However, the member 130 is advanced in a direction along the line of coaptation of the mitral valve leaflets and substantially perpendicular to the snare 136. The member 130 may be passed through the loop portion 136a of the snare 136 and through the wall surrounding the left atrium located substantially opposite to the wall through which the member 130 was inserted. Once extended transverse the left atrium LA, securing mechanisms, such as anchor pads 132, for example, may fix the member 130 with respect to the heart. Prior to securing the member 130, its length between

the chamber walls may be adjusted, as described above, in order to alter the distance between the valve trigones as desired.

[0144] Once the relatively rigid elongate member 130 is secured into position, the snare loop portion 136a may be tightened around it and the snare 136 secured on the external surface of the atrial wall by a securing mechanism, such as anchor pad 134 as shown in Fig. 7b. Thus, the snare 136 also may induce a shape change to the mitral valve annulus AN, as shown by the indented region of the mitral valve annulus in Fig. 7b. Both the relatively rigid elongate member 130 and the snare 136 may have their lengths adjusted as necessary to provide the overall desired shape change of the mitral valve annulus. The snare 136 may optionally be secured using a securing mechanism that extends from the annular level of the left atrium LA down the epicardial surface to a region proximate the left ventricle LV. This would allow the strut device to change the shape of the mitral valve both at a level of the valve annulus and at a subvalvular level.

[0145] In an alternate embodiment (not shown), the relatively rigid bar may be replaced by a splint assembly similar to the splint assemblies disclosed in U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated by reference herein. Such a splint assembly would be relatively flexible and capable of adjusting in length by adjusting the position of the anchor members with respect to the tension member of the splint assembly. The splint assembly may extend along the line of coaptation of the valve leaflets. In this case, the length of the tension member between the heart walls may be adjusted in order to maintain or achieve a more desirable trigonal distance.

[0146] Yet another exemplary embodiment for treating a heart valve includes an intrawall splint comprising an elongate member configured to be implanted within the heart wall so as to extend around a portion of the chamber. The elongate member may optionally be either wire-like, similar to the braided

tension members used with the splint assemblies of U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated by reference herein, or tubular. Because the device of this optional embodiment is implanted within and exterior to the heart wall, there is substantially no blood contact with the device, reducing the risk of thrombus formation.

[0147] An example of an intrawall splint 140 according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention is shown in Fig. 8. The intrawall splint 140 comprises an elongate member 141 that may be implanted within the lateral myocardial wall of the heart, optionally near the atrio-ventricular groove, in an area substantially coinciding with or slightly offset from the annular edge of the posterior leaflet. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 8, the elongate member 141 is secured to the heart using anchor assemblies 148, which may have configurations similar to those discussed with reference to Figs. 4b, 5d, 7a, and 7b, for example. The anchor assemblies 148 attach to the end portions of the elongate member 141 at an exterior surface of the heart wall. The anchor assemblies 148 may move along the length of the elongate member 141 to adjust the degree of compression on the heart wall. By appropriately positioning the anchor assemblies 148 on the elongate member 141, the arc length of the mitral valve annulus along the posterior side of the valve may be reduced. This may increase the coaptation area between the valve leaflets and decrease the annular cross-section. Once a suitable degree of shape change of the valve annulus occurs, which may be determined by observing the mitral valve regurgitation through the use of echocardiographic or other similar visualization techniques, the anchor assemblies 148 may be fixed to the elongate member 141 to hold the elongate member 141 in place with respect to the heart. The elongate member 141 and the anchor assemblies 148 shown in Fig. 8 may be implanted in a manner similar to the implantation techniques for the splint

assemblies of U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated by reference herein.

[0148] The elongate member 141 may be made of bio-inert, bio-stable, and/or bio-resorbable materials. In each of these cases, the implantation of the elongate member 141 within the heart wall may provoke a healing response by the heart wall. This healing response may elicit a chronic process that results in the shrinkage of the tissue in a direction along the axis of the elongate member. In another exemplary configuration, the elongate member 141 may be configured so as to deliver heat to the heart wall during delivery. Such heat also may initiate a healing response in the heart wall tissue, resulting in tissue shrinkage along the elongate member. For example, the member 141 may be made of a conductive metal and be heated, such as by temporarily exposing it to an electrical current, preferably in the RF range. In an exemplary embodiment, the RF range will be chosen so as to minimize electrical interference with the heart's conduction system.

[0149] Another exemplary embodiment of the invention includes an external plication device that may be positioned on an exterior surface of the heart wall near the posterior mitral valve annulus in substantially the same plane as the annulus. As with other devices discussed herein, such an external plication device may be placed so as to reduce the valve annulus cross-section and increase the valve leaflet coaptation area. Fig. 9 shows an example of an external plication device 150 according to an aspect of the invention. The external plication device 150 comprises a curved rod 151 anchored on an exterior surface of the heart wall by a series of sutures 152. A series of tissue anchors may be used instead of sutures. The rod 151 may be shortened, for example, by telescoping, to a fixed length to provide a reduction of the lateral heart wall and/or posterior annular space. Alternatively, the external plication

device may be implanted so as to reposition the papillary muscles, such as by reducing the intrapapillary distance, for example.

[0150] The rod 151 may be either relatively rigid or relatively flexible. A relatively flexible rod 151 may take the form of a tension member, such as the tension members used with the splint assemblies of U.S. Application No. 09/680,435, incorporated by reference herein. A relatively rigid rod may be preferable to provide a local shape change, while a relatively flexible rod may be preferable for changing the arc length of at least a portion of the valve annulus. The external plication device may be made of biocompatible materials. Alternatively, the external plication device may be made of bioresorbable materials that provoke a chronic healing response of the heart wall tissue. This healing response may result in a scarring, causing the tissue to shrink in a particular direction, thereby reducing the posterior annular arc length.

[0151] As with the intrawall splint device of Fig. 8, the external plication device is implanted so as to substantially avoid blood contact within the heart chamber, which reduces the risk of thrombus formation.

[0152] The devices of Figs. 8 and 9 are shown in position on the lateral wall of the heart proximate the posterior aspect of the mitral valve annulus. It is contemplated, however, that these devices may be implanted in other positions with respect to the heart while still helping to reduce mitral valve regurgitation or to treat other heart valves altogether.

[0153] Yet another aspect of the invention includes the use of so-called "plug" devices, for treating incompetent heart valves. These plug devices are intended assist in closing the mitral valve to prevent regurgitation by increasing the coaptation area of the mitral valve leaflets and/or decreasing the coaptation depth of the mitral valve leaflets. This generally may be accomplished by placing a plug device in the "hole" between the valve leaflets (i.e., the valve orifice), thereby providing a surface against which the valve leaflets may abut (i.e, coapt),

in order to close the mitral valve during systole. The plug devices described herein assist in closing the mitral valve substantially without altering the shape of the valve annulus and/or repositioning the papillary muscles. To further understand how the plug devices according to optional aspects of the invention operate to improve mitral valve function, reference is made to the various optional embodiments of the device shown in Figs. 10b-11m(ii).

[0154] Fig. 10a illustrates a schematic side view of the leaflets L of a dysfunctional mitral valve during systole. As seen in this figure, the leaflets L do not coapt so as to close the mitral valve orifice. Therefore, regurgitant flow will occur through the valve during systole. Fig. 10b illustrates the valve of Fig. 10a during systole with an exemplary embodiment of a plug member 160 of the present invention implanted in the valve leaflet coaptation space. As can be seen, the presence of the plug member 160 will block the regurgitant flow through the valve during systole as the leaflets L abut against the outer surface of the plug member 160. In other words, the plug member 160 "plugs" the valve orifice during systole to hinder or prevent blood from leaking through the valve.

[0155] In the exemplary embodiments of Figs. 11a-11f, a plug member is suspended in the coaptation space substantially in the area where regurgitant blood flow occurs. The suspended plug member may have a variety of shapes depending on factors such as the mitral valve geometry, the alignment of the valve leaflets, and the size and shape of the regurgitant opening during systole. For example, the suspended plug member may have a spherical configuration (160a in Fig. 11a), an ellipsoidal configuration (160b in Fig. 11b), a disk-shaped configuration (160c in Fig. 11c), a wing-like configuration (160d in Fig. 11d), or a sheet-like configuration (160e in Fig. 11e, 160f in Fig. 11f). Figs. 11a-11e show schematically a partial cross-sectional view of the mitral valve with the various plug members disposed between the valve leaflets L and within the valve orifice.

[0156] In Figs. 11a-11d, the valve is shown in an open position, with a space between the valve leaflets L and the outer surface of the plug member 160a-160d to allow blood flow therethrough. During closure of the valve, the leaflets L abut against the outer surface of the plug member 160a-160d, thereby preventing regurgitation through the valve orifice, which may otherwise occur if the leaflets are unable to properly coapt against one another. Fig. 11e shows schematically a partial cross-sectional view of a mitral valve during systole with a plug member 160e disposed between the valve leaflets L. The presence of the plug member 160e permits the valve to close during systole as a result of the valve leaflets L coapting against the surface of the plug member 160e. This coaptation will substantially prevent regurgitant blood flow from occurring during systole.

[0157] A suspended member 160d having a wing-like configuration, as shown in Fig. 11d, may provide an advantageous surface for the valve leaflets L to close against due to its tapered configuration. The tapered configuration substantially mutually corresponds to the profile of the valve leaflets surfaces themselves. Such a tapered and mutually corresponding shape may help to reduce thrombus formation at the blood-surface contact points with the suspended member 160d. Moreover, this shape may reduce insult to the valve leaflets L as they close against the surface of the suspended member 160d.

[0158] A suspended member 160e having a substantially sheet-like configuration may be particularly suitable for use as a plug device in patients having misaligned leaflets. In this case, as shown in Fig. 11e, the ends of the valve leaflets L tend to reach the centerline of the valve as they come together during systole. However, the leaflets L are arranged such that the ends of the leaflets L are in different transverse planes upon closing of the valve, therefore hindering proper coaptation and valve closure. The substantially planar plug member 160e in Fig. 11e may be suspended substantially along the centerline of

the valve, providing the misaligned valve ends with a surface to abut against. Due to its substantially planar configuration, the plug member 160e may minimize the cross-sectional area of the blood flow path that is blocked by the device, while also providing the desired closure of the valve. In an alternative embodiment, shown in Fig. 11f, the sheet-like plug 160f may be constructed of two layers sealed along their perimeters. This embodiment therefore may form an inflatable structure. Such an inflatable plug member may permit the cross-section of the member to be selected and varied according to the size of the "hole" between the improperly coapting valve leaflets.

[0159] As shown in the Figs. 11a - 11f, the plug members 160 operate to reduce mitral valve regurgitation and improve valve function by providing a surface against which the mitral valve leaflets may coapt during systole, thereby closing the valve to blood flow therethrough. Thus, these plug members 160 may operate as plugs to close the hole otherwise left open due to the inability of the valve leaflets to properly coapt. Providing such a surface against which the mitral valve leaflets may coapt may benefit both patients having valve leaflets with a reduced range of motion, for example, due to chordal tethering, and/or patients having leaflets unable to coapt due to left ventricular dilatation. The plug devices of Figs 11a - 11f also may enhance coaptation in patients whose leaflets are misaligned, since each leaflet may coapt with the surface provided by the plug member independently of the other leaflet.

[0160] Materials suitable for construction of the various plug devices disclosed herein may be categorized generally into the following broad groups: synthetic polymers, biological polymers, metals, ceramics, and engineered tissues. Suitable synthetic polymers may include fluoroethylenes, silicones, urethanes, polyamides, polyimides, polysulfone, poly-ether ketones, poly-methyl methacrylates, and other similar materials. Moreover, each of these

compositions potentially may be configured from a variety of molecular weights or physical conformations.

[0161] Suitable metals may be composed from a variety of biocompatible elements or alloys. Examples include titanium, Ti-6AL-4V, stainless steel alloys, chromium alloys, and cobalt alloys. The stainless steel alloys may include, for example, 304 and 316 stainless steel alloys. The cobalt alloys may include Elgiloy, MP35N, and Stellite, for example.

[0162] Suitable ceramic materials may be fashioned from pyrolytic carbon and other diamond-like materials, such as zirconium, for example. These materials may be applied to a variety of core materials, such as graphite, for example.

[0163] As for biological materials for manufacturing the devices, a variety of fixed tissues may be useful in the fabrication process. Base materials, such as pericardium, facia mater, dura mater, and vascular tissues may be fixed with a variety of chemical additives, such as aldehydes and epoxies, for example, so as to render them nonimmunogenic and biologically stable.

[0164] Tissues also may be engineered to meet the intended purpose. Substrates may be constructed from a variety of materials, such as resorbable polymers (e.g., polylactic acid, polyglycolic acid, or collagen). These materials may be coated with biologically active molecules to encourage cellular colonization. Additionally, these tissues may be constructed *in vitro*, for example using the patient's own cells or using universal cell lines. In this way, the tissue may maintain an ability to repair itself or grow with the patient. This may be particularly advantageous in the case of pediatric patients, for example.

[0165] Each of the previously mentioned materials also may be subjected to surface modification techniques, for example, to make them selectively bioreactive or nonreactive. Such modification may include physical modification, such as texturing; surface coatings, including hydrophilic polymers and ceramics

(e.g., pyrolytic carbon, zirconium nitrate, and aluminum oxide); electrical modification, such as ionic modification, for example; or coating or impregnation of biologically derived coatings, such as heparin, albumin, a variety of growth healing modification factors, such as, for example, vascular endothelial growth factors (VEGF), or other cytokines.

[0166] The tethers used to suspend the plug members, which will be described in more detail shortly, may be constructed of either monofilament or multifilament constructions, such as braids or cables, for example. Materials such as high strength polymers, including liquid crystal polymers (Vectran) and ultra high molecular weight polyethylene fibers (Spectra) may be suitable to provide desirable mechanical and fatigue properties. Suitable metals may include stainless steel, titanium alloys, and cobalt-chrome alloys, for example.

[0167] The materials discussed above are exemplary and not intended to limit the scope of the invention. Those skilled in the art would recognize that a variety of other similar suitable materials may be used for the plug devices and suspension members disclosed herein.

[0168] The suspended plug members 160a-160f of Figs. 11a - 11f may be anchored to the heart walls using anchoring members such as, for example, internal tissue anchors or anchor pads attached externally of the heart. An example of utilizing external anchor pads for suspending the plug members 160 within the valve orifice is illustrated in Fig. 12, which will be explained in more detail shortly.

[0169] Yet another exemplary embodiment of a plug device is illustrated in Figs. 11g(i), 11g(ii). The device of Figs. 11g(i), 11g(ii) comprises a tubular member 167 that may be at least partially collapsible and flexible. The top portion of the tubular member 167 may include a ring structure 168 that may be placed on the mitral valve annulus. The remaining portions of the tubular member 167 may be placed through the valve orifice between the valve leaflets

such that the tubular member 167 extends at least partially into the left ventricular chamber. When pressure in the left ventricle increases, such as during systole, for example, the mitral valve leaflets may begin to close. As the leaflets begin to close, the tubular member 167 collapses, as shown in Fig. 11g(ii), so as to close the tube 167 at its distal end. This closure closes the blood flow path between the left atrium and the left ventricle. Once the pressure in the left atrium again becomes higher than the pressure in the left ventricle, the tubular member 167 may open to allow bloodflow therethrough. The tubular plug member 167 itself therefore provides a type of valving mechanism without the need to remove the natural valve or provide other mechanical valve devices.

[0170] Other embodiments of expandable/collapsible plug devices that operate to perform valving functions are shown in Figs. 11h-11j. Figs. 11h(i), 11h(ii) illustrate a collapsible plug member 169 that has a hollow, tapered configuration. During diastole, as shown in Fig. 11h(i), the plug member 169 has an expanded configuration so that blood can flow through the plug member 169 and also between the leaflets L and the outer surface of the plug member 169. The plug member 169 is configured to collapse during systole, as shown in Fig. 11h(ii), so that the bottom portion 169B of the plug facing the left ventricle is closed off to prevent blood flow through the plug 169. In the collapsed configuration, the member 169 maintains a relatively wide profile at a top portion 169T and tapers toward the bottom portion 169B where the sides of the plug member 169 come together to close the plug member 169 to flow therethrough. The tapered sides also allow the valve leaflets to close against the plug member 169 during systole. In this manner, blood is substantially prevented from flowing through the mitral valve during systole.

[0171] Figs. 11i(i), 11i(ii) show yet another exemplary embodiment of a collapsible and expandable plug member 170. The plug member 170 includes two wing members 170a, 170b, and an articulation 171 connecting the two wing

members 170a, 170b at their top ends. During systole, as shown in Fig. 11i(i), the pressure in the left ventricle acts on the wing members 170a, 170b, causing them to pivot about the articulation 171 in an outward direction (i.e., the wing members 170a, 170b pivot away from each other). This pivoting outward of the wing members 170a, 170b allows the wing members 170a, 170b to abut with the valve leaflets L, thus closing the valve orifice to prevent bloodflow through the valve.

[0172] During diastole, as shown in Fig. 11i(ii), pressure from the left atrium causes the wing members 170a, 170b to pivot about the articulation 171 in an inward direction (i.e., the wing members 170a, 170b pivot toward each other). Thus, the wing members 170a, 170b separate from the leaflets L, allowing blood to flow through the valve from the left atrium into the left ventricle.

[0173] Yet another exemplary embodiment of an expandable and collapsible plug device is shown in Figs. 11j(i), 11j(ii). Fig. 11j(i) shows a collapsible plug member 172 during systole and Fig. 11j(ii) shows the collapsible plug device 172 during diastole. During systole, the plug member 172 essentially is in the form of a hollow cone with a base of the cone disposed proximate the free ends of the valve leaflets L. The sides 172a, 172b of the cone take on a concave configuration during systole, as shown in Fig. 11j(ii) so as to allow blood to flow between the sides 172a, 172b and the valve leaflets L. During diastole, the blood flow through the valve will cause the plug member 172 to expand, thereby billowing the side walls 172a, 172b outwardly such that they abut the valve leaflets L to restrict or prevent blood from flowing through the valve.

[0174] Another exemplary embodiment for a plug device may comprise a member that is suspended in place below the free edges of the valve leaflets in a plane substantially parallel to the valve annulus. Such a plug device is shown in Fig. 11k. In this embodiment, a piston-like plug device 173 having a disk member 174 suspended on the end of an elongate member 174' is movable

along the longitudinal axis of the valve. The disk member 174, which preferably has a circular or oval shape, is movable into and out of contact with the free ends of the valve leaflets L in accordance with the bloodflow through the heart. In this manner, the piston-like plug device 173 may operate similar to a one-way check valve, reducing regurgitation during systole by moving to seal the free ends of the valve leaflets L with the disk-like member 174, as shown in Fig. 11k, for example. During diastole, the piston-like plug device 173 may move in a direction toward the left ventricle such that the disk member 174 moves out of contact with the free ends of the valve leaflets L. Figs. 11l(i), 11l(ii) show an alternative arrangement of the piston-like plug device 173 of Fig. 11k. In this embodiment, the disk member 174l is made of a flexible or semi-flexible material. This material may allow the disk member 174l to obtain a reduced cross-sectional profile during diastole, as shown in Fig. 11l(i), allowing for a relatively normal size valve orifice blood flow area. During systole, the disk member 174l expands and inverts as pressure in the left ventricle increases causing blood to flow toward the valve. The disk member 174l envelops the ends of the valve leaflets L to substantially prevent regurgitant bloodflow through the valve, as shown in Fig. 11l(ii).

[0175] Yet another alternative arrangement of a plug device is shown in Figs. 11m(i), 11m(ii). In this exemplary embodiment, the device 175 is implanted such that a disk-like member 176 is situated substantially above the level of the valve leaflets L proximate the valve annulus AN. As shown in the Fig. 11m(i), the perimeter of the disk-like member 176 contacts the upper portions of the valve leaflets L proximate the valve annulus AN as the pressure in the left ventricle increases during systole, moving the valve leaflets L toward one another. This contact facilitates closure of the mitral valve orifice. On the other hand, during diastole, as shown in Fig. 11m(ii), the leaflets L move away from and out of contact with the disk-like member 176, allowing blood to flow between the disk-

like member 176 and the valve leaflets L from the left atrium LA in to the left ventricle LV.

[0176] The various devices shown in Figs. 11a-11m(ii) can be delivered and implanted in the heart using numerous approaches. Fig. 12 shows one example of an embodiment for implanting a plug device of the invention, indicated generally as 200, in the heart. In Fig. 12, the plug member 201 is suspended from at least one elongate member 202. The elongate member 202 optionally has a tether-like structure. Anchors 203 are provided on the ends of the elongate member 202 to secure the device to exterior portions of the heart wall HW. The anchors 203 optionally may be similar to the anchors discussed above with reference to Figs. 4b and 5d, for example. Fig. 12 shows an exemplary implantation position, namely a sub-annular position, for the plug device 200 with respect to the heart.

[0177] Numerous other implantation positions for the plug devices, discussed above with reference to Figs. 11a-11m, are envisioned and are considered within the scope of the invention. Some examples of these positions are shown in Figs. 13a-13d. The lines shown in these figures represent the extension of the elongate member (or members) 202, from which the plug member is suspended, between the anchors 203 secured to the exterior portions of the heart wall HW. Fig. 13a shows a long axis cross-sectional view (from the lateral side) of the left ventricle LV and left atrium LA. Each of the positions shown by lines A-D represents anterior-to-posterior positioning of a plug device. Line A represents a supra-annular, anterior-to-posterior position; line B represents a sub-annular, anterior-to-posterior position; line C represents a supra-annular, anterior to sub-annular, posterior position, and line D represents a supra-annular, posterior to sub-annular, anterior position. Fig. 13b shows various lateral-medial positions for a plug device. The various positions are indicated by lines E-H in Fig. 13b. Line E represents an intraventricular septum

S to sub-annular, lateral wall LW position; line F represents an intraventricular septum S to supra-annular, lateral wall LW position; line G represents an atrial septum AS to supra-annular, lateral wall LW position; and line H represents an atrial septum AS to sub-annular, lateral wall LW position. Fig. 13c shows a basal cut-away, cross-sectional view of the heart with the various positions corresponding to lines A-H in Figs. 13a and 13b represented. Fig. 13c also shows two additional optional positions, indicated by lines I and J, for the implantation of the plug devices. Line I represents an anterior-medial, supra-annular atrial wall AW to supra-annular atrial wall AW position and line J represents an anterior-medial, supra-annular atrial wall AW to sub-annular atrial wall AW position. Fig. 13d shows a long-axis cross-sectional view of the left ventricle LV and left atrium LA with an apical wall APW to atrial wall AW position, indicated by line K.

[0178] The particular position selected to implant a plug device may depend on a variety of factors, such as the condition of the patient's heart, including the heart valves, the delivery technique utilized to implant the device, the type of plug device utilized to treat the valve, and other similar factors. Each of the positions shown in Figs. 13a-13d, however, permits proper positioning of the plug device to prevent regurgitation and avoids damage to key coronary structure. Further, particular positions may be selected based on factors such as, for example, the geometry, including size and shape, of the valve orifice.

[0179] The plug devices of Figs. 11a-11m(ii) may be delivered to the heart in several ways, including ways that do not require placing the patient on bypass. Perhaps the most direct approach includes obtaining open chest access to the left ventricular and atrial walls. However, the devices also may be implanted using off-pump surgical techniques or endovascular techniques.

[0180] An example of an approach for delivery of the plug device of Fig. 12 is illustrated in Figs. 14a-14c. For exemplary purposes, the position of the

plug device resulting from the delivery shown in Figs. 14a-14c corresponds to position B, as shown in Figs. 13a and 13c. However, other positions for the plug device could be obtained using the delivery approach which will now be described. Moreover, plug devices other than that of Fig. 12 could be implanted via the delivery techniques to be described.

[0181] In Fig. 14a, a needle and stylet assembly 210 is passed through the left ventricle LV between the mitral valve leaflets L. The stylet 211 is then removed, as shown by the arrow in Fig. 14a, leaving only the hollow needle 212 in place. The position of the needle 212 between the leaflets L is represented by the label X in Fig. 14b. The plug device may then be delivered through the needle 212. Or, as shown in Fig. 14c, a leader assembly 213 may be attached to the elongate member 202 from which the plug member 201 is suspended. The plug member 201 may have a folded configuration or may be a collapsible and expandable member. A sheath 214 may retain the plug member 201 during delivery across the heart chamber. An anchor pad 203 may be attached to the proximal end of the elongate member 202 during delivery. The anchor pad may optionally be either fixed at a predetermined position on the elongate member 202 or it may be movable with respect to the elongate member 202 so that its position is adjustable. The leader assembly 213 may be advanced through the heart wall at the side opposite to the side the needle 212 entered, and the needle 212 may then be removed from the heart. The leader assembly 213 and the elongate member 202 may then be advanced further until the plug member 201 is extracted from the sheath 214. This extraction causes the plug member 201 to unfold. Once the plug member 201 is fully extracted from the sheath 214 and appropriately positioned between the mitral valve leaflets, retaining sheath 214 may be removed from the heart and the leader assembly removed from the elongate member 202. A second anchor pad 203 may be placed on the distal

end of the elongate member 202 to hold the plug device in place, as shown in Fig. 12.

[0182] An exemplary embodiment for delivering a plug device using a retaining sheath is illustrated in Fig. 14d. Elongate member 202 may be connected to a leader member (not shown), which may be in the form of a sharpened needle, or the like. The leader member is configured to pass through the heart wall and across the ventricle. As shown in Fig. 14d, removal of the plug member 201 from the retaining sheath 214 may occur by advancing the sheath 214 partially through the heart wall HW and pulling the elongate member 202 extending through the heart wall HW opposite to the retaining sheath 214. As the elongate member 202 is pulled, the plug member 201 advances out of the distal end of the sheath 214. Once the plug member 201 advances entirely out of the distal end of the sheath 214, it will have an unfolded or expanded configuration and may be positioned as desired between the mitral valve leaflets L by pulling on the elongate member (in the direction of the arrow shown in Fig. 14d).

[0183] Fig. 14e illustrates a top view of an implanted plug device, including plug member 201, during systole, according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The plug member 201 is disposed between the valve leaflets L and occupies the position of the valve opening O through which regurgitant flow would occur in the absence of valve treatment. Fig. 14f shows a top view of the implanted plug device during diastole, when the valve leaflets A, P are opened. As shown, flow through the valve O is permitted in the orifice space O between the leaflets A, P and the plug member 201.

[0184] Figs 15a-15c illustrate another delivery tool that may be used in lieu of those discussed with reference to Figs. 14a-14d. In this embodiment, the elongate member 202, the folded plug member 201, and a deployable anchor member 218 may be retained in a trocar and needle assembly 216, as shown in

Fig. 15a. The assembly 216 may be inserted across the heart such that it extends out of opposite heart walls and transverse the mitral valve in any of the positions discussed with reference to Figs. 13a-13d, or other suitable, desired positions. A pusher mechanism 217 may then be inserted through the proximal end of the trocar and needle assembly 216 to advance the plug device 200 from the distal end of the assembly 216. As shown in Fig. 15b, an anchor 218 attached to an elongate member 202 exits the assembly 216 first. The anchor 218 is attached to the elongate member 202 so as to extend substantially perpendicularly to the elongate member 202. However, when placed in the assembly 216, the anchor 218 is turned with respect to the elongate member 202 such that it lies substantially parallel to the elongate member 202.

[0185] Once the anchor 218 has advanced out of the assembly 216, the pusher mechanism may be removed and the assembly 216 and plug device 200 may be retracted back through the heart in a direction opposite to the direction of advancement of the assembly 216 into the heart. As the plug device 200 is retracted with the assembly 216, the anchor 218 will catch on the external surface of the heart wall, preventing the plug device 200 from being pulled back through the heart with the assembly 216. The assembly 216 may continue to be retracted out of the heart and off of the plug device 200 until the plug member 201 eventually exits the distal end of the assembly 216, as shown in Fig. 15c. Upon exiting the assembly 216, the plug member 201 unfolds. The plug member 201 may then be positioned appropriately with respect to the mitral valve and, once the assembly 216 has been entirely removed from the plug device 200, an anchor (not shown) may be placed on the free end of the elongate member opposite to the anchor 218 to secure the plug device 200 in position.

[0186] Yet another exemplary embodiment of a delivery technique for a folded plug member is illustrated in Figs. 16a-16d. In this embodiment, the plug

member 201 may have a folded configuration and be attached to a plurality of elongate members 202 (e.g., tethers) for suspending the plug member 201 in the mitral valve orifice between the leaflets, as described above. These elongate members 202 also assist in the unfolding of the plug member 201. Fig. 16a depicts the plug device 200 with the plug member 201 in a folded configuration and attached to four elongate members 202a-202d. The stylet and needle assembly, and the leader assembly described above with reference to Figs. 14a-14c may be used to deliver the plug device 200 to the valve. In this manner, the elongate members 202a and 202d may be advanced together through the needle assembly, for example, in a supra-annular position, as shown in Fig. 16b. Once advanced, the elongate members 202a and 202d exit one side of the left atrial wall and the elongate members 202b and 202c exit the left atrial wall at an opposite side. The plug member 201, still in a folded configuration, is suspended slightly above the annular level of the mitral valve MV adjacent the valve orifice.

[0187] To unfold the plug member 201, stylets 14 are attached to the free ends of the elongate members 202c and 202d. Using the needle stylets 14 to guide the free ends of the elongate members 202c, 202d, as shown in Fig. 16c, each member 202c, 202d is advanced back through the heart to an opposite side and to a sub-annular position, thus exiting through the left ventricular wall on a side opposite to its original exit through the left atrial wall. This action causes the plug member 201 to unfold and extend between the valve leaflets. The elongate members 202a-202d may then be secured with respect to the heart using external anchors 203, as shown in Fig. 16d. The plug device 200 in Fig. 16d thus has a supra-annular, sub-annular position.

[0188] Other techniques for delivery and implantation of the plug devices of the invention are envisioned and are considered to be within the scope of the invention. For example, the plug member and at least one of the anchor

members may be inflatable so that during delivery the members can be in a deflated configuration to facilitate passage through the heart wall or through a needle. As shown in Fig. 19, once the plug device 200 (i.e., at least one anchor and the plug member 202) is placed in the desired position relative to the mitral valve MV and heart wall HW, an inflator, which may optionally be in the form of a compressed air device or a needle 250 (as shown in Fig. 19) containing a fluid, such as PMMA (polymethylmethacrylate) P-HEMA (poly (2-hydroxyethyl methacrylate)), for example, may be connected to the elongate member and used to inflate the plug member 201 and the at least one anchor member 203. The elongate member in this case would be configured to allow passage of fluid therethrough to the plug member and at least one anchor member.

[0189] Fig. 20 illustrates an additional exemplary embodiment of an inflatable plug device 350. The plug device comprises plug member 351 made of two sheets 351a and 351b attached to each other along the edges. The plug device 350 also comprises tethers 352, for example, four tethers 352 attached to the plug member 351 proximate the corners of the sheets 351a, 351b. At least one of the tethers 352 may define a lumen configured for fluid flow therethrough. The lumen may be in flow communication with the plug member 351 so as to permit inflation of the plug member 351 via the lumen. In this manner, the plug member 351 may be filled to the desired shape and size as is needed to at least substantially prevent regurgitation through the valve.

[0190] Endovascular delivery techniques, including, for example, catheter-based delivery techniques, also are envisioned as within the scope of the invention. Such endovascular delivery techniques may be utilized in combination with the methods discussed with reference to Figs. 14a-19. For example, the plug devices may be delivered through a catheter advanced through the lumen of the aorta AO and across the left atrial chamber LA, as shown in Fig. 17a. Alternatively, as shown in Fig. 17b, the delivery path may be

through the lumen of the coronary sinus CS and the coronary vein CV, and from the coronary vein CV across the left atrial chamber LA. Yet another embodiment of an endovascular delivery path is shown in Fig. 17c. In this figure, the delivery path is through the lumen of the vena cava CV into the right atrial chamber RA and across the left atrial chamber LA.

[0191] The techniques for implanting the plug devices discussed above include extending elongate members, with the plug member suspended therefrom, substantially transversely from one wall of a heart chamber to an opposite wall of a heart chamber. In an alternative embodiment, shown in Figs. 18a and 18b. The plug member may be suspended from an elongate member that engages only on one side of the heart. Such a configuration may alleviate the need to traverse the entire heart chamber, thereby minimizing risk of damaging internal cardiac structure.

[0192] Fig. 18a shows an exemplary embodiment of a plug device 230 and anchoring frame 233 for engaging only one side of the heart to implant the plug device 230. The plug member 201, shown as an ellipsoid plug member in this figure, depends from a beam member 231 having a horizontally extending portion 231h and a shorter, vertically extending portion 231v. The plug member 201 is connected to the vertically extending portion 231v so that the plug member 201 is placed within the valve orifice between the valve leaflets, as shown in Fig 18b. Optionally, a intramuscular ingrowth sleeve 232, made of a Dacron velour, for example, may be placed around the horizontal portion 231h. The function of this sleeve 232 will be explained with reference to the discussion of the implantation of the device. The horizontal portion 231h connects to the anchoring frame 233 at an end opposite to the plug member 201. The anchoring frame 233 has a substantially I-shaped configuration and the horizontal portion 231h of the beam member 231 connects to the vertical leg 233v of the anchoring frame 233.

[0193] The horizontal legs 233h of the anchoring frame are placed on the external surfaces of the atrial wall and the ventricular wall, respectively, as shown in Fig 18b. The vertical leg 233v is thus spaced from the heart wall. The horizontal legs 233h may be secured to the heart walls by suturing or other suitable, similar attachment mechanisms. The horizontal portion 231h of the beam member 231 extends from the vertical leg 233v and through the atrial wall so as to suspend the plug member 201 in the appropriate position relative to the mitral valve MV. The sleeve 232 is positioned on the horizontal portion 231h, and optionally may be slidable relative thereto, such that the heart wall surrounds the sleeve 232. The sleeve 232 therefore provides a surface that permits ingrowth of the heart wall muscle to assist in stabilizing the device relative to the heart. The ingrowth of the heart wall into the sleeve 232 also may prevent damage to the heart wall which would otherwise occur as a result of relative motion between the heart wall and the horizontal portion 231h caused by the heart's beating.

[0194] It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made in the devices and related methods for improving mitral valve function of the present invention and in construction of such devices without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. As an example, a combination of devices depicted above may be used for achieving improved mitral valve function. Moreover, although reference has been made to treating the mitral valve and to the bloodflow patterns relating to the mitral valve, it is envisioned that other heart valves may be treated using the devices and methods of the present invention. Those having skill in the art would recognize how the devices and methods could be employed and/or modified to treat valves other than the mitral valve, taking into consideration factors such as the desired blood flow patterns through the valve. Other optional embodiments of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the

specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. The specification and examples are exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for treating a heart valve, comprising:
providing a device having an arcuate portion and at least one elongate portion configured to extend from the arcuate portion;
encircling at least a portion of an annulus of a heart valve with the arcuate portion;
adjusting a size of at least one of the arcuate portion and the elongate portion so as to alter a shape of the portion of the annulus; and
securing the at least one elongate portion to an exterior surface of the heart.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein providing the arcuate portion and the at least one elongate portion includes providing an elongate member and forming a loop in the elongate member such that the elongate portion extends from the loop.
3. The method of claim 2, further comprising adjusting the size of the loop so as to alter the shape of at least the portion of the annulus.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising an adjusting mechanism configured to slide along the elongate portion, wherein adjusting the size of the loop includes sliding the adjusting mechanism along the elongate portion.
5. The method of claim 3, further comprising extending the elongate portion from the arcuate portion through the heart wall.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein securing the elongate portion includes engaging an anchor assembly with the elongate portion adjacent the exterior surface of the heart wall.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein engaging the anchor assembly includes slidably engaging the anchor assembly with the elongate portion, and wherein the adjusting includes sliding the anchor assembly along the elongate portion to adjust the respective dimensions of the elongate portion and the loop.

8. The method of claim 7, further comprising compressing the exterior surface of the heart wall via the anchor assembly.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein providing the device includes providing a plurality of elongate portions extending from the arcuate portion.

10. The method of claim 2, wherein providing the device includes providing a tubular member disposed on at least a portion of the arcuate portion.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the heart valve is a mitral valve and encircling at least the portion of the annulus includes positioning the tubular member adjacent a posterior aspect of the annulus.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the tubular member is made of a substantially rigid material.

13. A method of treating a heart valve, comprising:
providing a device having an arcuate portion and at least one elongate member configured to extend from the arcuate portion;

placing the arcuate portion proximate an annulus of a heart valve;
extending the at least one elongate member from the arcuate portion; and
securing the at least one elongate member to an exterior surface of the
heart,

wherein the at least one elongate member extends from the arcuate
portion to the heart wall in substantially the same plane as the arcuate portion.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising connecting the at least
one elongate member to the arcuate portion.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the at least one elongate member
includes a tension member.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising extending the at least
one elongate member from the arcuate portion through a heart wall surrounding
a heart chamber associated with the valve.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising adjusting a length of
the elongate member between the arcuate portion and the heart wall so as to
alter the shape of at least the portion of the annulus.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein securing the at least one elongate
member comprises engaging an anchor assembly with the at least one elongate
member exterior to the heart.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising sliding the anchor
assembly along a length of the at least one elongate member and adjusting the
length of the elongate member between the arcuate portion and the heart wall.

20. The method of claim 13, further comprising a plurality of elongate members extending from the arcuate portion at differing angular positions along the arcuate portion.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein securing the at least one elongate member includes securing each of the plurality of elongate members to an exterior surface of the heart wall at differing angular positions along the heart wall.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein adjusting the size includes adjusting a length of each of the elongate members between the arcuate portion and the heart wall.

23. A device for treating a heart valve, the device comprising:
an arcuate portion configured to at least partly encircle an annulus of the heart valve; and

at least one elongate portion extending from the arcuate portion and configured to be secured to an exterior surface of a heart wall surrounding a heart chamber associated with the valve,

wherein at least one of the arcuate portion and the elongate portion is configured to be adjusted in size so as to alter a shape of at least a portion of the annulus.

24. The device of claim 23, wherein the arcuate portion and the at least one elongate portion are made as a single piece.

25. The device of claim 24, wherein the arcuate portion and the elongate portion are formed by an elongate member having a portion formed into a loop.

26. The device of claim 25, wherein the loop is configured to be adjusted in size.

27. The device of claim 26, further comprising an adjusting mechanism configured to slide along the elongate portion to adjust the respective sizes of the loop and the elongate portion.

28. The device of claim 25, wherein the elongate portion is configured to extend through the heart wall.

29. The device of claim 28, further comprising an anchor assembly configured to engage with the elongate portion at the exterior surface of the heart wall.

30. The device of claim 29, wherein the anchor assembly is slidably engageable with the elongate portion.

31. The device of claim 29, wherein the anchor assembly is configured to compress the external surface of the heart wall.

32. The device of claim 23, further comprising a plurality of elongate portions extending from the arcuate portion.

33. The device of claim 23, further comprising a tubular member disposed on at least a portion of the arcuate portion.

34. The device of claim 33, wherein the heart valve is a mitral valve and the tubular member is configured to be positioned adjacent a posterior aspect of the valve annulus.

35. The device of claim 34, wherein the tubular member is made of a substantially rigid material.

36. A device for treating a heart valve, the device comprising:
an arcuate portion configured to be positioned proximate an annulus of the heart valve; and
at least one elongate member extending from the arcuate portion and configured to be secured to an exterior surface of the heart wall,
wherein the at least one elongate member extends from the arcuate portion to the heart wall in substantially the same plane as the arcuate portion.

37. The device of claim 36, wherein the at least one elongate member is configured to connect to the arcuate portion.

38. The device of claim 36, wherein the at least one elongate member includes a tension member.

39. The device of claim 36, wherein the at least one elongate member is configured to extend from the arcuate portion through the heart wall surrounding the chamber associated with the valve.

40. The device of claim 36, wherein a length of the elongate member between the arcuate portion and the heart wall is configured to be adjusted.

41. The device of claim 36, further comprising an anchor assembly configured to engage the at least one elongate member exterior to the heart to secure the device in place with respect to the heart.

42. The device of claim 41, wherein the anchor assembly is slidable along a length of the at least one elongate member.

43. The device of claim 36, further comprising a plurality of elongate members extending from the arcuate portion at differing angular positions along the arcuate portion.

44. The device of claim 43, wherein each of the elongate members is configured to be secured to an exterior surface of the heart wall at differing angular positions along the heart wall.

45. The device of claim 43, wherein each of the elongate members is configured to have an adjustable length between the arcuate portion and the heart wall.

46. The device of claim 36, wherein the arcuate portion is substantially ring-shaped.

47. A device for treating a heart valve, the device comprising:

at least one substantially elongate member configured to be implanted in a lumen of a coronary vessel so as to encircle at least a portion of an annulus of the heart valve and alter a shape of at least the portion of the annulus; and a shape change element associated with the elongate member and configured to impart a local shape change to a portion of the valve annulus at a location corresponding to the shape change element.

48. The device of claim 47, wherein the heart valve is a mitral valve and at least a portion of the elongate member is configured to be positioned adjacent a posterior aspect of the valve.

49. The device of claim 47, further comprising at least one anchoring member configured to secure the elongate member in place within the lumen of the coronary vessel.

50. The device of claim 49, further comprising a plurality of anchoring members disposed along a length of the elongate member and configured to engage with a wall of the coronary vessel to secure the elongate member in place.

51. The device of claim 49, further comprising an anchoring member provided at each end of the elongate member.

52. The device of claim 51, wherein the anchoring members provided at each end of the elongate member are configured to engage a heart wall surrounding a heart chamber associated with the valve.

53. The device of claim 47, wherein the elongate member is configured to be friction fit within the lumen of the coronary sinus.

54. The device of claim 47, wherein the elongate member is heat-shrinkable.

55. The device of claim 47, wherein the shape change element includes a retractable wire disposed along a length of the elongate member.

56. The device of claim 55, wherein the wire is configured to form a bulge extending outward from the elongate member.

57. The device of claim 47, wherein the shape change element includes an annular shape change element disposed on the elongate member.

58. The device of claim 56, wherein the shape change element is slidably disposed on the elongate member.

59. A device for treating a heart valve, the device comprising:
at least one substantially elongate member comprising a plurality of rotatable elements, the elongate member being configured to be implanted in a lumen of a coronary vessel so as to encircle at least a portion of an annulus of the heart valve and alter a shape of at least the portion of the valve annulus,
wherein a shape of at least a portion of the elongate member is configured to be adjustable so as to impart a local shape change to a portion of the valve annulus at a location corresponding to at least the adjustable portion.

60. The device of claim 59, wherein the rotatable elements are configured to rotate about a longitudinal axis of the elongate member.

61. The device of claim 59, wherein the rotatable elements are independently rotatable.

62. The device of claim 59, wherein the rotatable elements are configured such that rotation of the rotatable elements alters the shape of at least the portion of the elongate member.

63. A method for treating a heart valve, comprising:
providing at least one substantially elongate member;
extending at least a portion of the elongate member within a heart wall surrounding a chamber of the heart associated with the heart valve so as to encircle at least a portion of the heart chamber;
securing the elongate member in place with respect to the heart; and
compressing at least a portion of a heart wall surrounding at least the portion of the heart chamber so as to move leaflets of the valve toward each other so as to assist the valve in closing during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

64. The method of claim 63, wherein the compressing includes compressing a portion of the heart wall proximate an annulus of the valve.

65. The method of claim 63, wherein the compressing includes compressing a portion of the heart wall proximate at least one papillary muscle associated with the valve.

66. The method of claim 63, further comprising engaging a pad with the at least one elongate member and compressing a portion of the heart wall proximate a location of the pad.

67. The method of claim 63, wherein moving the leaflets of the valve includes changing a shape of at least a portion of the valve annulus.

68. The method of claim 63, wherein moving the leaflets of the valve includes repositioning at least one papillary muscle to which at least one leaflet connects.

69. The method of claim 63, wherein the elongate member is made of a biocompatible material.

70. The method of claim 63, wherein providing the at least one elongate member includes providing at least one curved elongate member.

71. A method for treating a heart valve, comprising:
providing at least one substantially elongate member;
extending at least a portion of the elongate member within a lumen of a coronary sinus so as to encircle at least a portion of a heart chamber;
securing the elongate member in place with respect to the heart via at least one securement mechanism; and
compressing at least a portion of a heart wall surrounding at least the portion of the heart chamber so as to move leaflets of the valve toward each other so as to assist the valve in closing during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

72. The method of claim 71, further comprising delivering the elongate member endovascularly to the coronary sinus lumen.

73. The method of claim 71, wherein extending at least the portion of the elongate member includes extending at least the portion of the elongate member within the coronary sinus lumen adjacent a posterior aspect of a mitral valve.

74. The method of claim 71, wherein the valve is a mitral valve.

75. A device for treating a heart valve, the device comprising:
an elongate member having first and second oppositely disposed ends, the elongate member being relatively rigid;
a first anchoring member configured to be attached to the first end of the elongate member;
a second anchoring member configured to be attached to the second end of the elongate member,
wherein the first anchoring member is configured to engage a first exterior surface of a wall of the heart and the second anchoring member is configured to engage a second exterior surface of the wall of the heart to maintain a position of the elongate member transverse a heart chamber associated with the valve and substantially along a line of coaptation of the valve, and
wherein a length of the elongate member is such that the elongate member is capable of maintaining a substantially normal distance between trigones of the valve.

76. The device of claim 75, wherein the length of the elongate member is adjustable.

77. The device of claim 75, wherein the elongate member is a telescoping member.

78. The device of claim 75, wherein the elongate member is a bar.

79. The device of claim 75, wherein the elongate member is made of a material chosen from biocompatible metals and biocompatible polymers.

80. The device of claim 75, wherein the elongate member includes a first elongate member and the device further comprises a second elongate member having a first end portion configured to be connected to the first elongate member and a second opposite free end portion.

81. The device of claim 80, wherein the second elongate member is configured to extend substantially perpendicular to the first elongate member and is configured to be secured to a third exterior surface of the heart wall surrounding the chamber associate with the valve.

82. The device of claim 81, further comprising a third anchoring member configured to be attached to the free end portion of the second elongate member.

83. The device of claim 81, wherein the third anchoring member is configured to secure the second elongate member to the third exterior surface of the heart wall to thereby alter a shape of an annulus of the valve.

84. The device of claim 80, wherein the second elongate member is a tension member.

85. The device of claim 80, wherein the second elongate member is relatively flexible.

86. A method for treating a heart valve, the method comprising:
providing a relatively rigid elongate member having first and second oppositely disposed ends;
securing the first end of the elongate member to a first exterior heart wall surface; and
securing the second end of the elongate member to a second exterior heart wall surface, the second exterior surface being located substantially opposite to the first exterior surface such that the elongate member extends substantially transverse a heart chamber associated with the valve and substantially along a line of coaptation of the valve; and
maintaining a substantially normal distance between the trigones of the valve via the elongate member.

87. The method of claim 86, further comprising adjusting a length of the elongate member.

88. The method of claim 87, wherein adjusting the length of the elongate member includes telescoping the elongate member.

89. The method of claim 87, wherein the elongate member is a bar.

90. The method of claim 86, wherein the elongate member is made of a material chosen from biocompatible metals and biocompatible polymers.

91. The method of claim 86, wherein the elongate member is a first elongate member and the method further comprises providing a second elongate member and connecting a first end of the second elongate member to the first elongate member.

92. The method of claim 91, further comprising extending the second elongate member substantially perpendicular to the first elongate member and securing a second end of the second elongate member to a third exterior heart wall surface.

93. The method of claim 92, wherein securing the second end of the second elongate member to the third exterior heart wall surface includes altering a shape of an annulus of the valve.

94. The method of claim 91, wherein the second elongate member is a tension member.

95. The method of claim 91, wherein the second elongate member is relatively flexible.

96. The method of claim 86, further comprising providing a first anchoring member and a second anchoring member, and securing the first end of the elongate member to the first exterior surface via the first anchoring member and securing the second end of the elongate member to the second exterior surface via the second anchoring member

97. A device for treating leakage of a heart valve, the device comprising:

an expandable plug member having an external surface, at least a portion of the plug member being configured to be positioned proximate leaflets of the heart valve; and

a securement mechanism attached to the plug member and configured to secure the plug member with respect to the heart,

wherein during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle, the leaflets abut the external surface of the plug member to restrict bloodflow through the valve.

98. The device of claim 97, wherein the plug member is inflatable.

99. The device of claim 97, wherein the plug member is foldable.

100. The device of claim 97, wherein the securement mechanism includes at least one elongate member configured to suspend the plug member between the valve leaflets.

101. The device of claim 100, wherein the securement mechanism further comprises at least one anchoring member configured to secure the elongate member to a heart wall surrounding a chamber containing the valve.

102. The device of claim 101, wherein the elongate member is in the form of a tether.

103. The device of claim 97, wherein at least a portion of the plug member is configured to be positioned between the valve leaflets.

104. The device of claim 97, wherein at least a portion of the plug member is configured to be positioned below free ends of the valve leaflets.

105. The device of claim 97, wherein at least a portion of the plug member is configured to be positioned approximately at a level of an annulus of the valve.

106. The device of claim 97, wherein the plug member is configured to expand and collapse in response to pressure changes in the heart.

107. The device of claim 106, wherein the plug member is configured to collapse during systole.

108. The device of claim 106, wherein the plug member is configured to expand during diastole.

109. The device of claim 97, wherein the plug member defines at least one passage configured to permit bloodflow therethrough.

110. A device for treating leakage of a heart valve, the device comprising:

a plug member having a piston-like configuration and an external surface being configured to abut free ends of leaflets of the valve to restrict bloodflow through the valve during at least the portion of the cardiac cycle; and

a securement mechanism attached to the plug member and configured to secure the plug member with respect to the heart.

111. A method of preventing leakage in a heart valve comprising: providing an expandable plug member having an external surface; delivering the plug member to a heart chamber containing a valve; and positioning the plug member proximate leaflets of the valve such that the leaflets contact the external surface of the plug member during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle so as to restrict bloodflow through the valve.

112. The method of claim 111, further comprising inflating the plug member during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

113. The method of claim 111, further comprising expanding the plug member during at least a portion of the cardiac cycle.

114. The method of claim 111, further comprising unfolding the plug member upon delivery of the plug member to the heart chamber.

115. The method of claim 111, wherein positioning the plug member includes suspending the plug member via at least one elongate member.

116. The method of claim 115, further comprising securing the elongate member to a heart wall surrounding the heart chamber.

117. The method of claim 116, wherein securing the elongate member includes securing the elongate member via an anchoring member configured to engage the heart wall.

118. The method of claim 115, wherein the elongate member is in the form of a tether.

119. The method of claim 111, wherein positioning the plug member includes positioning at least a portion of the plug member between the valve leaflets.

120. The method of claim 111, wherein positioning the plug member includes positioning at least a portion of the plug member below free ends of the valve leaflets.

121. The method of claim 111, further comprising, in response to pressure changes in the heart, respectively expanding and collapsing the plug member.

122. The method of claim 121, further comprising collapsing the plug member during systole.

123. The method of claim 121, further comprising expanding the plug member during diastole.

124. The method of claim 111, further comprising flowing blood through at least one passage defined in the plug member during at least another portion of the cardiac cycle.